

**BUMED Oral History Project**  
**HMCS (ret.) Raymond Applewhite, USN**  
**Public Affairs Officer, Naval Hospital Camp Lejeune, NC**

*Date and Location of Interview:* June 18, 2014, Telephonic  
*Interviewer:* Mr. André Sobocinski, Historian, BUMED

**Synopsis**

Senior Chief Raymond Applewhite was born in Norfolk, VA, and raised in Wilson, NC, by his Aunt, Mrs. Lossie Jenkins Reid, who fulfilled the role of his foster mother. At an early age, Mr. Applewhite worked on local farms picking cotton and cropping tobacco to earn money for the basic necessities. Picking cotton often times would take him out of class for six-weeks each year. Despite this, he was able to excel through each grade and ultimately graduated from Charles H. Darden High School in Wilson, NC in 1969. In the interview, Mr. Applewhite shares his fascinating experiences growing up in the segregated south and living in poverty and literally on what some people described as "the wrong side of the railroad tracks."

In 1970, after graduating from Wilson County Technical Institute, Mr. Applewhite decided to enter the U.S. Navy and become a Hospital Corpsman. His interest in medicine stemmed from a part-time job as an Emergency Room hospital orderly at Wilson Memorial Hospital in Wilson, NC. He recalls working side by side with a former Hospital Corpsman who had served in Vietnam and credits him with raising his interests to join the Navy and become a Hospital Corpsman.

He enlisted in the United States Navy in December 1971. He completed Recruit Training (Boot Camp), at Naval Training Command, Orlando, FL, in January 1972 where he was assigned as First Platoon Leader.

In March 1972, he reported to Hospital Corps School, Great Lakes, IL. Later in July, after graduating Corps School, he reported to Naval Hospital Camp Lejeune, NC, for duty. He was promoted to Hospitalman and was hand-picked by the command and assigned to a special unit to assist with providing medical care to injured Marine officers returning from Vietnam.

Reporting for his first overseas tour of duty in September 1973, he was assigned to the Branch Clinic, United States Navy Training Command, Kenitra, Morocco. There he was selected as Sailor of the Month for outstanding performance of duty and was later promoted to Third Class Petty Officer.

Upon returning from overseas in August 1974, he reported for staff duty at Field Medical Service School, Camp Lejeune, NC. Upon reporting, Applewhite was not immediately accepted by some of the members of the Field Medical School Staff. In short, Applewhite was told by enlisted Senior leaders that the Commanding Officer felt that the Navy had mistakenly given him orders to be on the staff at the school, when in fact, the Navy

meant to assign him TEMDUINS orders as a student. Soon after reporting for duty, he was given a 96 hour "Special Liberty" to allow time for the administrative staff to contact the Bureau of Navy Personnel to have them correct what they felt was a discrepancy in the orders. When Applewhite returned from the 96, he was informed by the Command Master Chief Fred Monk that the Navy indicated that they had not made a mistake and that he was sent to the school for staff duty not as a student. At that time, he was the ONLY Navy personnel on the staff who was not a Navy instructor. He was assigned duty mainly as a Master-At Arms and performed whatever assignments he was given. Soon after reporting to the school, he was promoted to Second Class Petty Officer and requested to be sent to instructor school on more than one occasion. After several requests, the Commanding Officer approved funding for him to attend instructor school. He was assigned Instructor Duty upon completing Instructor Training at Fleet Mine Warfare Training Center, Norfolk, VA. Applewhite excelled in the instructor course and graduated early after accelerating the course. Upon returning to Field Medical School after graduation, he was told that he could not be an instructor until he went through the combat training course at Field Medical School along with the students. He went through the course and graduated in the top 10 of the class. Although it cannot be validated, it is believed that then HM3 Applewhite was the first African-American assigned to the Instructor staff at Field Medical Service School.

As a Second Class Petty Officer, he assumed the role of Battalion Medical Chief, 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 10th Marines, Camp Lejeune in January 1978. The other Battalion Medical Chiefs assigned to 10<sup>th</sup> Marines were all First Class Petty Officers. During this assignment he was promoted to First Class Petty Officer, selected as Sailor of the Quarter and later in the year he was selected as Sailor of the Year for 2<sup>nd</sup> Marine Division.

After a successful tour with 2D Marine Division, in February 1981, he reported to Naval Regional Medical Center, Charleston, SC where he was assigned as Assistant Department Head, Manpower Management. During this assignment he was promoted to Chief Petty Officer.

In March 1984, he returned to Camp Lejeune and was assigned as Battalion Medical Chief, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 8<sup>th</sup> Marines. Within 30 days of reporting he left for a six month deployment to the Mediterranean onboard USS *Inchon* (LPH-12). After returning in February 1985, he assumed the reigns of Headquarters Battalion, 2<sup>nd</sup> Marine Division as Battalion Medical Chief. During this assignment, he is credited with spearheading the assignment of the "first female Hospital Corpsmen" to Fleet Marine Force units. He was promoted to the rank of Senior Chief Hospital Corpsman during that tour of duty.

In March 1988, he returned to Naval Hospital Camp Lejeune where he was assigned as Department Head, Operating Management

and as the command Security Officer. In August 1990, he was assigned as Command Senior Chief, Brigade Service Support Group Four he embarked onboard USS *Guam* (LPH-9) for a seven-month period while deployed to the Persian Gulf in support of the liberation of Kuwait during Operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm.

After returning from the war in March 1991, he completed his tour at Naval Hospital. In July 1992 he was assigned as Command Senior Chief, Branch Medical Clinic, Bermuda. In September 1993 upon completion of that tour, he retired after 22 years of loyal and dedicated service in the United States Navy.

His personal awards include the Navy Commendation Medal (2 awards), the Navy Achievement Medal (2 awards), Combat Action Ribbon, and other service and unit awards.

Following retirement from the Navy, he joined the ranks of civil service and became the supervisor of the EC3 Service Center, Community Relations Officer and is currently assigned as the Public Affairs Officer, Naval Hospital, Camp Lejeune.

He is married to the former Georgia B. Hunter also of Wilson and they have two children, Rosalind and Denise.

### **Key Terms**

Beirut Barracks Bombing - On 23 October 1983, two truck bombs struck buildings housing American and French military in Lebanon as part of the multinational peacekeeping force. The attack killed 241 American military (including 220 Marines), 58 French military and six civilians. It was the largest single day KIA of Marines since Iwo Jima in WW II.

Branch Clinic, United States Navy Training Command, Kenitra, Morocco - The City of Kenitra (formally known as Port Lyautey) is located on the Sebou River at the Atlantic Ocean, just north of the Moroccan capital of Rabat. It was established in 1912 as Port Lyautey. After Morocco gained its independence from France in 1956, Port Lyautey was renamed Kenitra. For many years, the United States Navy maintained a command at Kenitra for training Moroccan soldiers. On 1 October 1978, the military bases at Kenitra, Sidi Yahia and Bouknadel were turned over to the Moroccan government. (Source: <http://www.usmcfew.com>).

BSS - Brigade Service Support

BUMED - Bureau of Medicine and Surgery

Charles H. Darden High School - Named after Charles Henry Darden (1854-1931) a former slave who became an important community leader and entrepreneur in Wilson, NC. Darden fathered ten children—three would become doctors, two lawyers, two morticians, two teachers and one would become

a nurse. (Source: Haber, Barbara. *From Hardtack to Home Fries: An Uncommon History of American Cooks and Meals*. New York, NY: Simon & Shuster, 2002).

FMF - Fleet Marine Force

FMSS - Field Medical Service School Camp Lejeune, NC is a seven week "C" school conducted to prepare Navy Corpsmen for assignment to Marine Corps units; awards NEC 8404, Field Medical Service Technician. It was established on 4 September 1950.

Naval Hospital Camp Lejeune, NC - Navy medical facilities have been located along the New River in North Carolina since the end of the Civil War. In 1941, construction began on a new Navy medical facility at Hadnot Point on the east bank of the New River with the mission to support the Marine Corps Base at Camp Lejeune. Opening on 20 January 1942 (and commissioned on 1 May 1943), this 600-bed hospital was called "Naval Hospital New River" until being redesignated as "Naval Hospital Camp Lejeune" on 1 November 1944.

Operation Eastern Exit - Codename given to the military evacuation of the United States Embassy in Mogadishu, Somalia. On 1 January 1991, after increasing violence in Mogadishu during the Somali Civil War (23 January 1991-Present) the U.S. ambassador to Somalia requested military assistance to evacuate the embassy. Over the course of the subsequent nine days, USS *Guam*, USS *Trenton*, the 4<sup>th</sup> Marine Expeditionary Brigade, Air Force AC-130s, and Navy SEALs evacuated 281 diplomats. The evacuation was declared complete at 0343 on 6 January when the last CH-46 wave returned to the USS *Guam*. The ships turned north for Muscat, Oman, with 281 evacuees, including eight ambassadors, 61 Americans, and 39 Soviets. The entire expedition lasted less than 10 days. From the launch of the CH-53Es to the return of the last CH-46s, the evacuation itself had lasted less than 24 hours. On 11 January 1991, the USS *Guam* and USS *Trenton* offloaded the evacuees in Muscat, including an infant born aboard ship, bringing the operation to a successful conclusion. The operations lead to the rescue of 281 people—from 30 different countries. (Source: [www.globalsecurity.org](http://www.globalsecurity.org)).

Trailways- Founded in 1936, Trailways is an American transportation system of 80 independent bus companies. It is headquartered in Fairfax, VA.

USS *Guam* (LPH-9) - Commissioned on 16 January 1965, USS *Guam* was an *Iwo Jima*-class amphibious assault ship. She was the third ship named after the Battle of Guam (8-10 December 1941). USS *Guam* was decommissioned in 1998.

USS *Inchon* (LPH/MCS-12) - Commissioned on 20 June 1970, USS *Inchon* was an *Iwo Jima*-class amphibious assault ship. It was named after the Battle of Inchon (10-19 September

1950), a turning point in the Korean War. She was decommissioned on 20 June 2002.

Wilson, NC - Wilson, NC is located in the heart of eastern North Carolina, and about 40 miles east of the capital city of Raleigh. For many years, Wilson was known as the "World's Greatest Tobacco Market."

### **Quotes**

"I remember when I was in the sixth grade my foster mother apologized to me profusely because when I went back to school the teacher read my note aloud to the class, 'Please excuse Raymond and allow him back in school, the cotton season is over.' Words to that effect, 'Please accept him back in school.' That note had to be delivered to the principal of the school and then to the teacher and she read it out loud to the students and for some reason it embarrassed the heck out of me."

"There was a Chief Boatswain's Mate Hughes who was my Company Commander. I remember him quite well for obvious reasons, but one he wore what I've learned to be, a Master Mason's ring. They had a special way they treated all the recruits and it really had nothing to do with the color of your skin."

"One of the things that I routinely tell every CO is that while the metrics will seem extremely important, the most important thing you can do is to show and treat people with dignity and respect. The men and women that work at this hospital are here for obvious reasons, it's not because the salaries are great, but they're here because most of them want to take care and provide a service to patients. Dignity and respect is at the forefront of everything that I intend to do."